



Maryland Outdoor Learning Partnership (OLP) Access to Nature Working Group Meeting Minutes

Date and Time: Monday, May 19, 2025, 2:00 – 3:00 PM

Attendees

Rick Garber (Working Group Co-Chair), Chris Wheedleton (Working Group Co-Chair), Stephanie Tuckfield (OLP Co-Chair's Designee), Jo Anne Murray, Kristen Komlosy, Karen McDonald, Payton Hesse, Katie Dell

Welcome & Meeting Began at 2:03

Discuss Barriers and Solutions from Last Month's Presentations

- Valuable information shared in last meeting from Oregon: using percentage of students have access to outdoor school (multi-day, overnight program including science instruction and SEL development) to inform future goals. They have this data due to required report to legislature (taken on by Oregon Extension) funded through State Statute.
- In Maryland we don't have this level of data specificity, have a great variety of implementation of outdoor learning and also have context of local control which impacts funding as well as implementation.
- Discussed interest in a Needs Assessment, some information provided in ELIT ([LEA Summaries](#)) which could be mined for data along with collect anecdotal information.



- New school constructions and renovations, planners are encouraged to have outdoor learning space; could be opportunity to work with IAC—Jo Anne Murray will follow up with further information.
- Needs we hear continually: funding and PD. These would also apply to school renovations (ex. Funding building and maintenance of these spaces and PD for educators on how to use them effectively and comfortably).
- Funding for Oregon is secure through a dedicated source (lottery) vs. Washington's funding has been cut because of general source and state deficit.
- Example of program implementation: staffing and funding allows for all 5th graders to participate in BioBlitz and secondary opportunities are based on individual schools' ability to participate (school funds used), other factors include risk management.
- We currently see funding discussion arise every year, perhaps due to unsustainable funding sources.
- Other factors: [State Aided Institutions \(SAI\)](#) funding (ex. one organization resourced at about \$200/student to about \$50/student over twenty years due to increase demand, costs); Funding challenges are also connected to equity and are impacted by turnover of leadership (i.e. LEA Superintendent)
- [MELAN GenThrive survey responses presented graphically](#)—could be recommendation to continue this work to have database of outdoor education providers.

Discuss What's Missing to Inform our Recommendations

- Data on outdoor education in Maryland to help LEAs know whom they can partner with or identify LEAs which are in need of more support
- Teacher preparation—field experience for pre-service educators



- Sustainable funding to ensure equity of access. Note that draft Outdoor School for All bill was introduced last session but needs input from legislative experts and partner agency support. Could lesson be learned from Local Management Board? What were previous barriers—buy-in or fiscal?
- Opportunity to connect with CTE given requirements in Blueprint (45% of students required to complete apprenticeship or Industry Recognized Credential); Barren Island could be an example of connection in Dorchester County where there will be an influx of in-demand environmental related jobs.
- Professional development framework to get outdoor educators together (could be opportunity for data-mine as well); MAEOE Conference is opportunity but is broad and not solely focused on outdoor learning.
- Improving MSDE credits for PD programs. Note you can find more information on [MSDE's website](#) about the shift from certification to licensure and the associated shift to PDPs from CPD.
- Addressing biophobia among students, educators and their families.
- Next steps:
 - o Examining summary of recommendations
 - o Aligning assets to recommendations
 - o As a group, determining which recommendations to move forward with
 - o Note: Rick and Chris will follow up with the group on pre-work for next meeting on Monday, June 9th

Meeting Closed at 3:00